

My name is Elin Hert and I believe in public education and the opportunities it provides for all children. I have two children in the Bozeman School District and have been very involved with their elementary school, volunteering in the classroom and as an active member of the parent organization, of which I have been president for the last three years.

I'm here to testify in support of Senate Bills 69 and 70, which will provide necessary funding in order for the schools in our state to work towards the goals stated in the Montana Board of Public Education's vision statement, which specifically refer to "an exceptional system of education."

With the Governor's proposed budget for 2009-10, the Bozeman School District is looking at a significant and severe budget shortfall. If the two senate bills are passed our district will still face a shortfall, but it will be considerably reduced. While the mathematic formulas used to determine the education budget are extremely complex, when you are a parent like me, you boil it down to its simplest form. Major cuts to an already inadequate budget. As an involved parent I am keenly aware that it is not fat that will be trimmed, because the Bozeman School District is 100% fat-free.

One question I have for the committee is, what about the vision? The governor's budget proposal will not allow for quality education in our district, never mind exceptional, because it doesn't provide us with what we need, to protect even the very basics—the Three Rs if you will. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are not considered exceptional in our country, and with large class sizes and a lack of resources and aids this year, our teachers are challenged to succeed in teaching even that. To have to make cuts from this already insufficient state has me wondering if our children will receive a decent education next year, never mind one that is exceptional or even good.

While I don't want to sound unappreciative, and you may be skeptical of my pessimism, it is first-hand experiences, observations, and conversations with our principal and superintendent that lead me to this conclusion. I have watched our principal rob Peter to pay Paul for many years. School supplies money for teachers has not been raised in six years at our school because the money is being used instead for capital expenditures, like replacing 50-year-old desks. Our parent organization isn't able to spend as much money on enrichment as we'd like because we're spending it on painting dingy lockers and replacing old, rickety, dangerous library bookcases just so our kids and teachers have a decent place to live each day. One area of "enrichment" that our parents do pay for is the school's art program. Of course, many people do not believe art to be enrichment at all, but rather an integral part of a well-rounded, exceptional education.

My request of you is to pass this legislation so that we don't further erode the current state of Montana's public education system. One of the things I've taught my children is "If you are going to do something, do it well or don't do it at all." That's where my thoughts are with education. Why spend as much money as we do, then set the system up for failure by not going the extra mile? We're not asking for anything extravagant here. Sadly, we're simply asking for enough money to maintain the status quo and maintain our accreditation. I'm quite certain that the taxpayers of Montana support public education. Does this state support public education or not? If so, as it states in the Montana constitution, ~~then~~ let's give it a fair shot.

ELIN HERT

216 S. 10<sup>TH</sup> AVE.

BOZEMAN MT 59715

406 586 1290

ELINANDDOUG@HOTMAIL.COM